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RFC # 545

COMPUTER SYSTEMS
LABORATORY--UCSB
John R. Pickens
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References:
RFC#531,369,519

OF WHAT QUALITY BE THE UCSB RESOURCE EVALUATORS?
A Response to "Feast or Famine"

In RFC#531, M.A. Padlipsky complains that the UCSB resource evaluators were derelict in not consulting the Resource Notebook for available documentation. In addition, Padlipsky equates the goals of the resource evaluators to the goals of the software repository advocaters. A misunderstanding exists and perhaps, with this note, may be cleared.

To respond to Padlipsky's example of UCSB botching login attempts let me make two comments. First, more people than the resource evaluators were accessing the ARPANET. The group of evaluators, at least, knew the login procedure from the Resource Notebook. (By the way, we do have a Multics Programmers Manual.) Second, the OLS TELNET echoes no lower case, which can generate confusion. Even UCSB's technical liaison, after consulting the Resource Notebook, managed to botch his login.

The first law of resource evaluation, at least for UCSB evaluators, is "read the Resource Notebook!" (RFC#369, incidentally, was based on a Resource Notebook that was barren compared to the notebook of today.) Questions left unanswered by the Notebook are resolved by accessing online documentation first at the NIC and second at the site being evaluated. If, after all this effort, questions still exist, then a consultant is contacted. Consultation may be either online or by telephone and may entail purchasing appropriate user manuals (for some of the resources we evaluated, no manuals existed). Our approach has been to consult the most publicly available documentation first. Only if the advertized paths fail do we resort to personal contact with a (busy) technical liaison. If technical liaisons wish to be consultants for unitiated users and feel that this is their role we will gladly modify our behavior.

There certainly is a meal, to use Padlipsky's analogy, of documentation already available on the Network. However, a meal is no good without silverware. Site specific and function specific MINIMANS (see RFC#369 and RFC#519) are attempts to provide this tableware. Our first-pass MINIMANS are available on request for those who would like to see what we are trying to do.

Resource evaluators are concerned with much more than documentation. A closer reading of prior RFC's would have shown that we investigate dynamic phenomenon such as help facilities, online consultation, response time, reliability, and human engineering. We make suggestions for improvement. Indeed we see ourselves, at least for UCSB users, in the role of plain clothes inspector. We

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don't claim absolute efficiency but we do claim good intent and good results. We have spurred improvements at local as well as foreign network sites. We apologize to any we may have offended in the past with poor reviews. We are learning, continually, how best to say things in a constructive rather than destructive way.